



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

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REMINDER ABOUT GEAR REQUIREMENTS FOR SEA TURTLE AND SMALLTOOTH SAWFISH RELEASE AS REQUIRED BY AMENDMENT 18A TO THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE REEF FISH RESOURCES OF THE GULF OF MEXICO EFFECTIVE DATE: SEPTEMBER 8, 2006

NOAA Fisheries Service requires the following turtle release gear on all vessels with commercial and for-hire reef fish vessel permits in the Gulf of Mexico:

- One dipnet;
- One pair of long-nose or needle-nose pliers;
- One pair of bolt cutters;
- One pair of monofilament line cutters;
- Two types of mouth openers/mouth gags; and
- One short-handled dehooker.

Vessels with a freeboard height greater than four feet must also have onboard:

- One long-handled line clipper and
- One long-handled dehooker.

Additionally, two types of gear were inadvertently not included in the final rule to implement Amendment 18A due to an error. Therefore, these items are currently not required but are recommended. Measures to require these items will be proposed and if approved, they will be required. The items are:

- One auto tire or other cushioned surface and
- One long-handled device to pull an "inverted V".

All vessels would be required to possess an auto tire or other cushioned surface. Vessels with a freeboard height greater than four feet would be required to possess a long-handled device to pull an "inverted V." NOAA Fisheries Service will soon be proposing these two additional requirements in the *Federal Register* for public comment.

Description of Gear

A *dipnet* facilitates safe handling of sea turtles by allowing them to be brought onboard for fishing gear removal. It must have a net hoop of at least 31 inches inside diameter, a bag depth of at least 38 inches, and the bag mesh must not exceed three inches. There must be

no sharp edges or burrs on the hoop or where it is attached to the handle. For vessels with freeboard heights greater than four feet, the dipnet hoop must be securely fastened to an extended reach handle with a length of six feet or 150 percent of the freeboard height, whichever is greater. For vessels with freeboard heights four feet or less, the handle length can be variable. The handle must be able to support a minimum of 100 pounds without significant breaking or distortion.

Long-nose or needle-nose pliers can be used to remove deeply embedded hooks that must be twisted during removal from the turtle's flesh or front of mouth. They must be approximately 12 inches in length, and should be constructed of stainless steel.

Bolt cutters are used to cut hooks to facilitate hook removal. They must be approximately 17 inches in total length, with four-inch long blades that are 2 ¼ inches wide, when closed, and have 13-inch long handles. Required bolt cutters must be able to cut hard metals, such as stainless or carbon steel hooks, up to ¼-inch in diameter.

Monofilament line cutters are used to cut fishing line as close to the eye of the hook as possible if the hook is swallowed or cannot be removed. They must be approximately 7 1/2 inches in length. The blades must be one inch in length and 5/8-inch wide, when closed, and are recommended to be coated with Teflon.®

Mouth openers/mouth gags are used to open sea turtle mouths, and to keep them open when removing ingested hooks from boated turtles. At least two of the seven different types of mouth openers/gags listed below are required: a block of hardwood, a set of three canine mouth gags, a set of two sturdy dog chew bones, a set of two rope loops covered with hose, a hank of rope, a set of four PVC splice couplings, or a large avian oral speculum.

Long-handled line clippers are designed to cut high test monofilament line as close as possible to the hook and to assist in removing line from entangled sea turtles which are not boated. The clipper must consist of a protected, secured and easily replaceable cutting blade and an extended reach handle (six feet or 150 percent of freeboard, whichever is greater). The cutting blade must be capable of cutting 400-lb test (0.078 – 0.83 in.) monofilament line or polypropylene multistrand material. The blade must also be curved, recessed, contained in a holder or otherwise designed to facilitate its safe use so the direct contact between the cutting surface and the sea turtle or the user is prevented.

Short-handled dehookers are designed to remove internal or external hooks from boated sea turtles. The dehooker should consist of a hook removal device (constructed of ¼-inch 316L stainless steel and no larger than 1 5/16 inch outside diameter with no unprotected points) and a handle with lengths between 16–24 inches. A sliding PVC bite block must be used to protect the beak and facilitate hook removal if the turtle bites down on the dehooking device.

Long-handled dehookers are designed to remove hooks from sea turtles that cannot be boated or to engage a loose hook when a turtle is entangled but not hooked. The dehooker should consist of a hook removal device (constructed of ¼-inch 316L stainless steel and no larger than 1 5/16 inch outside diameter with no unprotected points) and a handle with a length of six feet or 150 percent of freeboard, whichever is greater.

Description of Recommended Gear

A standard auto tire or other cushioned surface is used to rest a sea turtle on if it is boated. Other cushioned surfaces include life rings, seat cushions, life jackets, or life vests.

A Long-handled device to pull an “inverted V” is used to pull a “V” in the fishing line when implementing the “inverted V” dehooking technique and consists of a hook

end (such as a standard boat hook or gaff constructed of stainless steel or aluminum) and an extended reach handle with a length of six feet or 150 percent of the freeboard height, whichever is greater.

Vessels with commercial and for-hire reef fish vessel permits must possess inside the wheelhouse, or within a waterproof case if no wheelhouse, a copy of the protocol titled, “Careful Release Protocols for Sea Turtle Release with Minimal Injury,” and must post the sea turtle handling and release guidelines laminated placard inside the wheelhouse, or in an easily viewable area if no wheelhouse. The protocol and placard can be found online at: <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/> and can also be requested from the Southeast Regional Office at the address above. NOAA Fisheries Service will be mailing the laminated placard and protocol to all reef fish commercial and for-hire permit holders.

Smalltooth Sawfish Protocol

For vessels with commercial and for hire reef fish permits that incidentally catch a smalltooth sawfish, NOAA Fisheries Service would require the following: (1) Keep sawfish in the water at all times; (2) if it can be done safely, untangle the line if it is wrapped around the saw; (3) cut line as close to the hook as possible; and (4) do not handle the animal or attempt to remove any hooks on the saw, except for with a long-handled dehooker.

Also on the Web

Frequently Asked Questions about sea turtle release protocol and gear: <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/>.

Demonstration videos along with more detailed descriptions of sea turtle handling guidelines can be found at <http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/seaturtlefisheriesobservers.jsp> and http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/hmsdocument_files/protected_species.htm. Spanish and Vietnamese translations of the protocol and demonstration videos can also be found online at these websites.

Required Item			Examples of NMFS Approved Models
These Items Required for Any Vessel with a Freeboard Height Greater than 4ft	Long-handled line cutter (6ft. or 150 percent of freeboard height, which ever is greater)		LaForce Line Cutter; Arceneaux Line Clipper
	Choose At Least One	Long-handled ¹ (6ft. (1.83 m) or 150 percent of freeboard height, which ever is greater) dehooker for ingested hooks ²	ARC Pole Model, BP11 Deep Hooked Dehooker
		Long-handled ¹ (6 ft. (1.83 m) or 150 percent of freeboard height) dehooker for external hooks	ARC 6 ft. Pole Big Game Dehooker Model 6P10; ARC Model LJ6P (6 ft. or 1.83 m)
	Choose At Least One	Dipnet (must have at least 31 in diameter and handle may be of variable length)	ARC Breakdown Lightweight Dipnet Model (DN6P (6 ft.), DNO8 (8 ft.), or DN14 (12 ft.)); Lindgren Pittman, Inc. Model NMFS-Turtle Net; ARC net assembly and Handle (Model DNIN)
		Short Handled Dehooker for Ingested Hooks ²	ARC 17-in. Hand Held Bite Block Deep Hooked Turtle Dehooking Device (Model ST08)
		Short Handled Dehooker for External Hooks	ARC 16-in Hand Held Large J-style Dehooker (Model LJ07); ARC 24-in Hand Held Large J-style Dehooker (Model LJ24); or ARC 17-in. (43.18 cm) Hand Held Bite Block Deep Hooked Turtle Dehooking Device (Model STO8); or Scotty’s Dehooker
	Long-nose or Needle-nose Pliers		12 in. S.S. NuMark Model #030281109871; any 12-in. stainless steel long or needle-nose pliers
	Bolt Cutter		H.K. Porter Model 1490 AC
	Monofilament Line Cutter		Jinkai Model MC-T
	Two (2) of the following Mouth Openers and Mouth Gags		
	Choose At Least Two Different Types	Block of Hard Wood	Any block of hard wood or long-handled wire brush (e.g., Olympia Tools Model 974174)
		Set of (3) Canine Mouth Gags	Jorvet Model 4160, 4162, and 4164
		Set of (2) Sturdy Dog Chew Bones	Nylabone®, Gumabone®, or Galileo® (trademarks owned by T. F. H. Publications, Inc)
		Set of (2) Rope Loops Covered with Hose	Any set of (2) rope loops covered with hose meeting design standards
		Hank of Rope	Any size soft braided nylon rope is acceptable, provided it creates a hank of rope approximately 2–4 in. thickness
Set of (4) PVC Splice Couplings		A set of (4) Standard Schedule 40 PVC splice couplings (1-in., 1.25-in., 1.5-in., and 2-in.)	
Large Avian Oral Speculum		Webster Vet Supply Model (Model 85408); Veterinary Specialty Products (Model VSP 216–08); Jorvet (Model J–51z); and Krusse (Model 273117)	
Gear Recommended ³	Standard Automobile Tire ³ Recommended for all vessels.	Any standard automobile tire or other comparable, cushioned, elevated surface that allows boated turtles to be immobilized	
	Long-handled device to pull an “inverted V” (6 ft. (1.83 m) or 150 percent of freeboard height, which ever is greater) ³ Recommended for vessels with a freeboard height greater than 4ft.	ARC Model LJ6P (6 ft.); ARC Pole Model Deep Hooked Dehooker (Model BP11); ARC 6 ft. Pole Big Game Dehooker (Model P610); Davis Telescoping Boat Hook (Model 85002A); West Marine Fishing Gaff (Model F6H5 with F6–006 handle)	

¹ A short-handled dehooker with an appropriate length handle extender will also fulfill this requirement

² A dehooker that is approved for the removal of both internal and external hooks is recommended. Do not attempt to remove ingested hooks until you have received training on the proper use of internal dehookers and internal dehooking techniques.

³ This gear was inadvertently omitted from the final rule due to an error. Therefore, these items are currently not required but are recommended. Measures to require these items will be proposed and if approved, will be required.

Disclaimer: This placard is meant to help fishermen comply with sea turtle release measures contained in regulations published in the Federal Register on August 9, 2006 (71 FR 45428), and select the appropriate required sea turtle release gear for their vessel. All sea turtle release gear must meet the specific requirements in 50 CFR 635.21(c)(5)(A-L). Any discrepancies between the contents of this guide and the regulations will be resolved in favor of the regulations published in the Federal Register or Code of Federal Regulations.

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